

# DANA

AN IRISH MAGAZINE OF INDEPENDENT THOUGHT

No. 12

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# DANA

AN IRISH MAGAZINE OF INDEPENDENT THOUGHT

WANTED: A DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT.

THAT the Parnell "split" marked a certain turning-point in the political movement in Ireland is a common-place of every political survey of the last decade. A great personality was withdrawn who had, by force of character, raised the parliamentary movement to a high degree of efficiency and enthusiasm. The wretched squabble which followed Parnell's death was almost barren of serious principle, the only redeeming thing about it being the claim of the Parnellites to freedom from clerical interference, a sound democratic principle, however defective the cause in which it was invoked. Those who know anything of the hardships and persecutions then suffered by Parnellites in country districts in Ireland know what clericalism in action really means, and also know the brave and splendid struggle which poor and often humble men waged against desperate odds. To the social historian of the future the proceedings in the Meath election petition will doubtless form a document of crucial importance. Indeed, the courage with which the brow-beating priest was then faced is an example to some of our newer teachers, who seem often afraid to commit themselves to anything like straightforward criticism of clerical abuses.

At the same time the whole episode, whilst eminently dramatic, left one somewhat bewildered. You felt that a bitter fight was being fought practically over nothing, and the phenomenon was scarcely edifying. You could never be sure that if any really democratic issue were raised the line of cleavage over it would be even approximately that of Parnellite and Anti-Parnellite. There were men of essentially democratic sympathies in both camps, and likewise there were men of essentially reactionary or conservative sympathies in both.

One notable effect, however, of the "split" was to turn the growing minds of the then rising generation away from parliamentary and, in fact, from political interests. The rise of the Gaelic League is one of the results of the slack-

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ening of political enthusiasm. The political arena seemed to the youth of 1890 a dull place, where there was plenty of abuse and very little else. The spectacle of Mr. Healy—himself absolutely devoid of any constructive policy—emerging every now and then to pour vitriolic abuse on Mr. Justin M'Carthy or Mr. Dillon; and Mr. Redmond, in turn, declaiming against Mr. Dillon and Mr. Healy—all this, after the novelty wore off, was merely stupid. Mr. Healy is the only one of the band who has not, it seems, definitely left those times behind. Just as Mr. Chamberlain is said to still live in the days of "mafficking," so Mr. Healy still looks with longing on the crowded, glorious days of 1890 and the spring of '91, when he used to call Parnell a "thief," and pose as the one true saviour of the Church.

Now it is customary to speak of the extra-political movements of the last few years as entirely and obviously purifying and beneficial. Some of these movements, notably the Gaelic League, have made for self-reliance. But some of the allied movements are in different case, whilst over all there is a weakness in the sense that the spirit of democracy, the spirit of intellectual freedom, is absent. Instead of trying to stimulate the growth of independence, there is a desire on the part of these new movements to "capture" the old orthodoxy. The appearance of Archbishop Walsh on the League platform at a time when the League, without his assistance, had become a popular force, marks in its way, too, the end of a period. The League has become a convention almost before it became a faith, so that everyone, from the purveyors of dogma to the purveyors of bread, are courting its favour, or, rather, are using it for their own ends. In the "Language procession" a limited-liability bakery company—whose shares may be bought by any foreign investor—together with a joint-stock bottle works, a limited-liability brick works, and numbers of other concerns are allowed to advertise themselves freely.

This *bourgeois* tail is really a depressing element in the situation. The "Industrial Revival" movement, so-called, is a middle-class capitalist affair, as far removed as possible from true democratic politics. Already the more extreme advocates of the capitalist revival are preaching the virtues of Protection, and have adopted the exploded fallacies of Mr. Chamberlain, with his retinue of dukes and anonymous magnates, as the fit policy for the Irish people to voluntarily adopt. The whole thing is vicious in the extreme,

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whilst there is, of course, no necessary connection whatever between the demand for political independence and the policy of asking the Irish people to pay more for their commodities, and thereby stint themselves, in order to artificially increase the profits of those, in very many cases not even Nationalists, who supply the capital to the various industries.

This is not the occasion to enter into a minute criticism of the primitive error of Protectionism. But all these policies, which concern themselves with tariffs, trade-marks, water-marks, industrial expansion, and all the rest, are the politics of capitalism. The policy of democracy is concerned with securing for the people better education, better houses, shorter hours, larger wages, more rational amusement, less temptation to drinking, and generally larger opportunities of a higher and more humane life. It is not necessary here to raise any question of that more drastic reconstruction of society on a co-operative basis which is advocated by Socialists. But it is clear that the democratic policy referred to is the very antithesis of that commercialism, the main object of which is primarily to aggrandise the propertied class. If commercialism takes note of the people at all, it is only incidentally, as supplying the labour-power necessary for the capitalist. It may be answered, of course, that the only way of helping the working-class, as things go, is by affording employers greater opportunities of exploiting them. It is not a very noble conception of social possibilities. But, such as it is, it happens to be fallacious. By raising the standard of living and increasing the purchasing power of the workers we would be doing more to stimulate industry than all the "commercialist" devices will accomplish in a generation. Increase wages and you increase consumption; increase profits and you merely help that over-capitalisation which is a social evil.

We require, in truth, in Ireland, more of the spirit of democracy and humanity, and less of mere racial passion and racial egotism. We need to curb the rapacity of wealth, whether it wear a Celtic or a Saxon garb; and we need to help the poor and down-trodden, whether they be Catholics or Orangemen, or neither. The later movements in Ireland seem as ignorant as the former of the facts of that economic struggle which is going on in every European country under the capitalist *regime*, whilst remedies are proposed to us as radical cures that have not produced any effect anywhere else. Nations that have never lost their

own language or their own peculiar mode of dancing have their poor and their outcast class, whilst in the very capital of the rich British Empire itself there are tens of thousands on the brink of starvation.

Such problems confront us in Ireland too, and their cure requires, before all else, a broad and comprehensive outlook upon life. We have to realise that the business of true statesmanship lies in raising the lot of the poor and the down-trodden in the community, and checking the growth of wealth and power in the hands of the few. It is of no importance in the eye of sane politics to what race the few belong, or whether their ancestors came over with the Milesians or with Cromwell. These things are trifles. All national and race antagonism, like all sectarian antagonism, is kept alive by the masters and grinders of the people, in order to separate and thus more easily dominate them. We have seen under our own eyes the very process in operation in a corner of Ulster, where Catholics and Protestants are kept in a constant state of mutual fury in the interests of a corrupt oligarchy. Assuredly, then, unpopular in some ears as the prescription may sound, we need the spirit of democracy and the spirit of humanity. Where men calumniate and thwart each other through generations over the barren question of the stereotyped form of words in which they should praise the God Whom they declare is the common Father of them all, the breeze of common sense is needed. "God save Ireland" has been the prayer of generations. The record of the centuries is a grim comment on its futility. Ireland has been left to welter in anarchic strife, and to be the prey of a foreign despotism, and not until men turn from the feud over phantoms to the fight for reality will we better the ignoble record.

LIONEL VANE.

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## MICHAEL, A MEDITATOR.

MICHAEL DOHERTY began his meditations, as most people do, at a very early age. Be it observed that by meditations here are meant chiefly speculative musings upon large impersonal subjects, such as would seem appropriately to occupy the philosophic mind. This mind, according to the poet, is brought us by the years; but, if so, as an act of restitution rather than as a gift, since it was ours at the outset; but in fact it probably remains all along latent, being merely thrust into the background by the urgent trivialities that crowd to the front as life advances. Later on, when the throng of these slackens and dwindles, the original disposition to be interested about matters of wider scope may once more manifest itself. We have all noticed the proneness of the extremely young to ask questions which the most self-confident gnostic can hardly answer off-hand. *Where was everything before there was anything? Who made nothing? Can time stop like a clock?* Simple ontological queries of this kind are often indeed discouraged by evasive or priggish replies; but the tendency to put them, and ponder on them, is more effectually counteracted by the examination to which the child presently finds himself subjected, not by any means in a scholastic sense alone. *What does C-A-T spell? How much is twice four?* and so forth, are but items in a shorter catechism. Another indefinitely longer one runs on propounding more intimate and more miscellaneous questions, which grow progressively harder to answer successfully, while the consequences of failure seem far more serious than the unsatisfied curiosity resulting from baffled attempts to grapple with the mysteries of existence.

But at last, as a rule, there comes a time when the child's age-worn son has no longer occasion to occupy himself much with these problems, and finds leisure, perhaps thrust upon him, to resume his earliest studies. He is not always disposed to do so. Sometimes in the course of his experiences he has lost his taste for anything except practical affairs, and as his own active part in them grows less, he merely contemplates his neighbour's concerns from a gossip's point of view, without any profound speculations about How and Why. Sometimes he has waxed apathetic, and turning a lack lustre eye upon nothing in particular,

solaces himself possibly with tobacco, but certainly not with philosophy. Still the fact remains that there is not uncommonly a return to the meditative mood, and that when old people sit by the hearth, or lounge in sheltered corners out of doors, the chances are in favour of its rather frequent recurrence.

As for Michael Doherty, at no period of his life did his habit of high thinking fall entirely into abeyance, though it did not escape some of the usual interruptions. Among the first of these was his schooling, which consisted largely of learning by heart incomprehensible arithmetical and grammatical rules. Reading and writing, it is true, he also acquired, but as he had nothing practically to read or write, and no prospect of ever having anything, the accomplishment seemed to him a part of the plan by which his elders chose to make life unnecessarily difficult and irksome. His schooldays, however, were but brief, for on his father's death he went to live with a grandmother, who thought him more profitably employed in scaring crows at a shilling a week, although she did complain that his "bits of wages were ready to go on him agin he had them earned, what with his little shirts, and shoes, and such." Crow-scaring Michael found much more compatible with meditation than lessons had been; he could shout and throw stones without thinking about it at all, and his mind was generally occupied by some wholly irrelevant subject. When in process of time he was promoted to other sorts of farm-work, these tasks could mostly be done in the same automatic way, leaving his thoughts a very elastic tether. Probably he let them range with excessive disregard for the matter in hand; at any rate his reputation as a labourer never stood high, and his employers not seldom spoke of, and to, him as a "quare, wool-gathering gomeral."

That character of his had been fairly well established, as he was a year or so over twenty, when his meditations were again disturbed, this time by—to write large—political events. The local branch of a secret society had felt that stirring of sap which a while later on put forth leaves, soon blighted, in the Fenian movement; and Michael Doherty was among those whom something springlike in the air set dreaming so vividly that they could not refrain from endeavours, however futile and fantastic, to realise their patriotic visions. Yet the enterprize could hardly be said actually to have obstructed the flow of his musings so much as to have given them a different and more definite channel; for though he took his due part in illegal drilling

and amassing of fire-arms, it was as a maker of songs that he won some distinction among his comrades. They had been disposed to consider his adhesion a doubtful benefit. "Nobody could tell what trouble the great gaby might land them in, and he moonin' about half the time the way it would be even chances if he knew whether he was talkin' to a peeler or a priest." The gift revealed itself suddenly and spontaneously, his first lyrics being almost improvisations, and having once begun, he continued with eager thought to compose his Tyrtæan lays, which he would fain have sung too, had not nature denied him any adequate voice. It was his cousin, Terence M'Cormack, big and burly, who trolled them out in a sonorous baritone to favourite old airs, and Michael Doherty, listening with large bright eyes, like a wistful terrier, had to be content with a moderate share of the applause. He did not, it is true, in the least grudge Terence his larger portion, and notwithstanding that he would have liked better to be singing himself, he liked right well to form one of the audience. Perhaps life brought him no happier moments.

These rebel days, however, came swiftly to an end. The spark had been kindled prematurely, and finding no sufficient fuel ready for it, presently blinked out again. And almost before this happened Michael had met with the gravest interruption to his philosophic mood that it ever encountered. For utterly unphilosophical were the thoughts about Norah Connell which began to fill his mind, both waking and sleeping. Norah was a daughter of Matt Connell, at whose house the conspirators held their most frequent meetings, and the dark-blue eyes of Norah, and her soft black tresses, and her ray-bright glance, and her honey-sweet voice, were soon sharing his rhymes with the sorrows and hopes of Erin. On that theme he never satisfied himself as nearly as he sometimes did in his patriotic verses, still less did he ever imagine himself repeating or mentioning his love-songs to anybody. His boldest steps in such a direction were merely wonderings as to what Norah would have thought if he had ever ventured to hint something of his sentiments towards her. What she would have thought, and how the matter would have ended, had his proceedings been more practical, must now remain always doubtful. But the upshot of it was that while he kept on dreaming and adoring, without, as far as anybody could see, ever "looking her side of the road," Terence M'Cormack had been paying her assiduous court personally, and carrying on negotiations with her parents through a

friend, as etiquette prescribed. Accordingly one day into the dim and magically hued mists of Michael's phantasies flared and crashed the thunderbolt announcement that Terence M'Cormack and Norah Connell were "about getting married at the Shrove."

For a while Michael felt benumbed and paralysed, and when his ordinary faculties returned to him, their revival, as is common in such cases, was attended by very disagreeable sensations, which made him cast about for something wherewith to divert his thoughts. It was not easy to find, all his romantic dreams having vanished, and the verse-making that had charmed away so many tedious hours being embittered by baneful associations. Nevertheless, this it was that gave him a clue to what he wanted. A habit of writing down his compositions had recalled to him his slender stock of learning, and its value now, in the loss of his other few treasures, so rose in his esteem that he resolved to increase it. Just at this time there had accrued to him his small share of the family property, and he made up his mind to spend it in qualifying himself for the post of national school-teacher. He looked forward to that object, indeed, with none of his earlier raptures. It seemed to him only the best thing he could do in the circumstances, which were not rapturous at all. But the goal, though it promised none of the delight attached to a successful revolution, or a happy wooing, had like many another humdrum second best the merit of attainability, and Michael reached it in due course. Moreover, after a space of desperate counterfeiting, he was able to kindle in himself some genuine enthusiasm for the pursuit of knowledge; and by degrees his taste for abstract meditations returned to him. So that after he was appointed Teacher of the small national school at Inverdrum, not far from his native village, he led a fairly contended and suitable sort of existence, looked up to by his neighbours as a man of profound learning, and none the worse liked because he had the name of not being over sharp or worldly wise.

Close on thirty years passed in this peaceful way, and then an untoward event occurred in the shape of a new school manager, who entertained views of his own about the most appropriate teacher for Inverdrum. He lost no time in giving effect to these opinions by an energetic search after reasons for ousting Michael Doherty, and he was successful with a thoroughness which once more discredited the oft-refuted fallacy that it takes two to make

a quarrel. Michael certainly by no means desired one, being attached both to his place and to his pupils ; but his disposition made him slower than a more wide-awake man would have been at the reading of ominous signs that might have put him on his guard, and helped him to hang on longer. As it was, he found himself dismissed ere he had well begun to suspect that the sour looks and manners of his new superior betokened anything more than the usual unpleasantness of novelty. Thus Michael Doherty departed sorrowfully from his ink-bespattered schoolroom, and trim little house, where Father Crinion's candidate reigned in his stead.

This catastrophe at first threatened to supersede all his philosophising by sordid cares about ways and means of subsistence, for his three-score years seemed a hopeless obstacle to another appointment, and how was his livelihood to be earned? That question was solved, however, by the death of his eldest brother, like himself an old bachelor, who having inherited the Doherty bit of land, had thriven well thereon. The little property now fell to Michael, setting him above the fear of want, but at the same time causing him some perplexity, since to spend the rest of his days in farm-affairs, about which he was ignorant and uninterested, appeared to him a fate not much better than bodily starvation, namely, a perpetual mental fast. Anxiety to avoid it incited him to an unwonted promptitude of action. His favourite sister, Joanna O'Meara, was by this time a widow with several grown sons, and he immediately made over to them the management and profits of the farm, stipulating only for the few weekly shillings which he considered necessary for his support. These were so few indeed that some other members of his family, concerned less on his behalf than at the outrageous good luck of "them O'Mearas," strongly represented to him how very bad a bargain he was concluding. But Michael replied : "Sure, so long as I have me plenty wid it, what more would I want, unless to be tormintin' meself?" And he took up his abode, well satisfied, in a little shanty at Inverdrum.

There he lived for many a year, albeit on his first establishment he had demurred about the darning of his thatch, on the grounds that "'twas apt to last him what little time he would be stoppin' under e'er a roof, good or bad." His time was now at his own disposal, barring the trivial household tasks, which his frugal habits simplified and shortened—too much, in the opinion of old Mrs. Gahan,

his nearest, yet tolerably distant, neighbour. She was scandalised at the indifference of a man who would seldom take the trouble to cook himself a rasher of bacon, "and he well able to afford it;" and she even avowed her belief that, if he could have got them, he would have bought his potatoes "ready boiled, and eaten them as cowl'd as the clay they grew in," than which reckless sloth could no further go.

But though Michael might scamp his cookery, and neglect his opportunities at meals, he did not fail to make the most of a happy chance that came in his way not long after his retirement into private life. There was a sale of furniture at a large house in the neighbourhood, and the contents of the library went for a penny a stone. Of these Michael purchased as many as he could carry home with the help of Kit the Fool, who was able-bodied enough; and weighty were the burdens he imposed upon himself and his assistant. None the less he looked with covetous, wistful eyes on the dusty, cobwebby volumes left lying in heaps beyond his means of transport, and never once on the long trudge home did he wish his load an ounce the lighter. His joy in his purchase was quite as intense as poor Kit's over his guerdon of sugarsticks, and more enduring by far. His ponderous pennyworths became the solace of many a lagging winter's night and lonely summer noon.

Yet reading did not supplant his favourite pastime: he left himself ample leisure for meditations too. Weather permitting, he often carried them on out of doors in a nook much to his mind, situated at the top of a cart-track, which descends steeply to the shore. An unprofitable stone-quarry, soon and long since abandoned, has slightly notched the south end of the sea-fronting cliffs. This recess faces south-eastward, looking obliquely over a tract of beach, where the waves march to and fro across sand and shingle, and a wide plough-land, where the white seagulls fly up like foam about the shaggy feet of the trampling horses. Several rough blocks of reddish stone here gave a choice of seats variously sheltered and surveying, and on one or other of these was frequently to be discovered the figure of Michael Doherty, small and spare, in his long coat and tall hat, both worn to greenness. There he found at will seclusion so complete that nothing disturbed him more than the shifting of the lights and shadows, yet not so remote as to hinder him from looking on at what was done and let alone by his neighbours, many of whom were his

former pupils. If he wished for conversation, he seated himself on a flat-topped stone beside the track, along which there was pretty sure to be some coming and going; if he preferred silent meditation he withdrew to another, where, screened by a projecting bank, he eluded notice, unless a whiff from his pipe floated out and led the passer-by to say: "Fine day, Mr. Doherty." The advantages of the place endeared it to him more and more as time went on, and he haunted it with increasing frequency. In doing so his conduct seemed somewhat inconsistent with one of his aphorisms, to the effect that: It was a bad sign when you could find a body in the one place ever, like as if he had roots instead of feet on him. But then he applied it to persons whose circumstances were very unlike his own. And consistency is sometimes but pig-headedness writ *fine*.

Occasionally he fell in with an old crony, or a younger favourite, whose turn of mind resembled his own, and when this happened Michael proved himself a good listener, seldom interrupting the longest monologue, and almost always hearing enough of it to enable him to offer an apposite comment at its close. If any difference of opinion occurred it was usually a rather lopsided one, so to speak, as his views upon most points were far from positive. It sometimes happened, too, that neighbours, who in ordinary circumstances showed no philosophic bent, were moved by some crisis in their fate to think deeply for themselves, as well as to utter their reflections; and these people instinctively resorted to Michael Doherty, as to a person of understanding, who would receive whatever they said on its own merits, being nowise bound beforehand to approval or dissent. He listened to them, as a rule, with considerable interest, often finding his mind thereafter stirred and filled, like a rock-pool into which a wave had washed. In fact, one way or the other, he had as many opportunities for discourse as he desired, and did not want for means of making notes whereon to practise the meditation in which he took delight.

JANE BARLOW.



### “THE WELL OF THE SAINTS.”

EN suivant cet hiver à Dublin le mouvement des théâtres, j'ai été frappé de ce fait qu'il n'existe pas en Irlande de théâtre national. On n'y voit point représenter de pièces tirées par des écrivains irlandais de l'observation des mœurs et de la vie irlandaises ; les acteurs des différentes troupes ne sont pas non plus des Irlandais : ils viennent, comme les pièces qu'ils jouent, de Londres, et Dublin n'a pas plus d'art dramatique local que Birmingham, Glasgow, ou Leeds. Drame de Shakespeare, joués suivant une tradition surannée, avec des décors et des costumes plutôt défraîchis, par une troupe qui ne serait pas acceptée sur une scène de Londres ; comédies musicales sans plan aucun, suite de scènes décousues où la nullité des motifs musicaux le dispute à l'absence de gaieté vraiment spirituelle ; mélodrames populaires, violents, brutaux, à gros effet, pleins de coups de fusil et de niaise sentimentalité, telles furent les exhibitions théâtrales de la saison, sans parler bien entendu de l'absurde music-hall.

Aussi ça-t-il été pour moi une très agréable surprise que d'assister le mois dernier, à l'Abbey Theatre, à la représentation de la pièce de M. Synge : “The Well of the Saints.” Je n'ai pas l'intention de raconter à ce propos l'histoire des débuts de ce théâtre, histoire qui est celle des difficultés de tout genre qu'éprouvèrent les initiateurs à l'organiser et à en faire admettre l'idée, difficultés que rencontre généralement, paraît-il, toute tentative d'introduire en Irlande un peu de culture moderne et d'art indépendant. Je voudrais seulement, en exprimant quelques réflexions que m'ont inspirées la représentation et une lecture attentive de la pièce, faire voir combien le “Well of the Saints,” qui a passé presque inaperçu, contraste avec les autres productions dramatiques du même temps. C'est une œuvre subtile et gracieuse, l'esquisse d'un drame plutôt peut-être qu'un drame proprement dit, mais le raffinement de l'observation, l'usage discret et adroit qui y est fait du symbolisme, et aussi la langue, une langue à la fois savante et populaire, adroite utilisation par la plume d'un artiste du dialecte anglais parlé par les paysans de l'Ouest de l'Irlande, en font tout l'opposé du banal et du vulgaire.

Un mendiant aveugle, vieux et sordide, Martin Doul,



a épousé Mary Doul, aveugle elle aussi, et aussi laide que lui. Mais tous deux se croient beaux : ils ne savent pas que c'est par dérision qu'on appelle Mary "la belle brune de Ballinatone," et ils vivent heureux dans cette illusion, entretenue par les gens de leur voisinage. Pourtant Martin Doul est devenu aveugle trop tard pour n'avoir pas une juste idée de la beauté des femmes, et souvent le désir lui vient de recouvrer la vue, ne fût-ce qu'un instant, pour voir Molly Byrne, la jeune fiancée de Timmy le forgeron : elle doit être si séduisante si son physique répond à sa voix ! Voix douce, harmonieuse, bien différente de l'horrible voix fêlée de Mary Doul. Un saint va faire ce miracle. Là-bas, dans une île rocheuse de l'ouest, est le tombeau de quatre saints bénis de Dieu, et derrière le tombeau un puits où poussent des fougères : l'eau du puits rend la vue aux aveugles. Une fois guéri, Martin Doul ne reconnaît point sa femme. Il prend successivement Molly Byrne, Bride et une autre jeune fille pour Mary Doul : elles le repoussent en se moquant de lui. Revenus de leur méprise et se voyant désormais tels qu'ils sont, Martin Doul et sa femme se prennent à se haïr, ils s'injurient, se menacent, veulent même se frapper. On les sépare : ils se quittent mortels ennemis.

Au deuxième acte, Martin Doul est occupé à fendre du bois chez Timmy le forgeron, qui l'a recueilli par pitié. Bien qu'il n'ait à peu près rien à faire chez lui, il ne cesse de maugréer. Il se plaignait d'être aveugle, il se plaint maintenant de voir. C'est surtout le bonheur de Timmy, qui va épouser la jolie Molly Byrne, qui le fait enrager. Justement la voici : entre eux commence un dialogue, écrit avec beaucoup d'art, et où sans doute il faut voir la scène principale et comme le centre de la pièce, celle où l'auteur a fait apparaître dans tout son relief le véritable caractère de son personnage, à la fois passionné et aigri par le malheur. Martin Doul cherche à plaire à Molly Byrne, d'abord elle s'amuse un peu de lui, puis le repousse. Il la prend par le bras, veut la forcer à marcher avec lui vers les villes du sud, vers les pays où le soleil est chaud et belle la lumière du ciel. Timmy, appelé par Molly Byrne, accourt pour le mettre à la porte ; cependant Martin Doul sent de nouveau sa vue s'obscurcir, ce jour ensoleillé lui semble sombre : le bienfait du saint n'a que peu duré. Dans un dernier accès de passion furieuse, il essaie une dernière fois d'entraîner Molly Byrne et il faut que Timmy le menace de son marteau pour qu'il s'éloigne, en le couvrant, lui et sa fiancée, de malédictions.

Il est redevenu aveugle : pour pallier un peu l'in vraisemblance du miracle, M. Synge a eu recours à ce moyen terme d'une guérison imparfaite, bientôt suivie d'une rechute. Et comme il est assis, au bord du chemin, solitaire, exposé au froid et aux averses, il se prend à songer que Mary Doul, malgré ses défauts, valait peut-être tout de même mieux que rien. S'étant rencontrés, ils commencent par s'injurier, puis tentent de se réconcilier. Mary est fière de sa chevelure, Martin se fera pousser une belle barbe : de la sorte ils seront encore beaux. Comme ils se laissent pénétrer par la volupté douce et légère d'un beau jour irlandais, ils entendent de nouveau la cloche du saint, qui parcourt la campagne. Mais ils en ont assez de ses bienfaits. Lorsque le saint veut malgré lui guérir Mary, Martin fait semblant d'accepter lui aussi d'être guéri, mais au moment où le saint s'approche, il lui renverse brutalement des mains le vase contenant l'eau sainte. Puis les deux aveugles s'éloignent, poursuivis des malédictions du peuple et le troisième acte finit par le mariage du forgeron et de Molly Byrne.

L'action se passe dans un coin montagneux de l'Irlande, il y a plusieurs siècles, ou, si l'on veut, dans une Irlande idéale, qui est aussi l'Irlande réelle. Il est difficile d'imaginer rien de plus particulièrement irlandais que le cadre, les personnages, et toute l'atmosphère générale de la pièce. C'est, j'imagine, dans l'humanité primitive et pourtant complexe de l'ouest irlandais, où il a longtemps vécu, que M. Synge a pris les éléments du caractère de Martin Doul. L'âpreté hargneuse du mendiant aveugle, toujours disposé à croire qu'on veut lui nuire, même quand on lui fait du bien, ses lubies jalouses, ses accès de brutalité, et surtout cette extraordinaire puissance d'injure et d'insulte par où il exhale son mépris des hommes, qui n'a guère d'égal que sa passion, contenue, cachée, mais indomptable, pour l'amour et la vie, font du personnage de Martin Doul une figure singulièrement caractérisée, bien différente, certes, du type du paysan irlandais de convention, tantôt mélancolique et triste à pleurer, tantôt d'une jovialité de commande, qu'on trouvait jusqu'ici décrit dans la littérature anglo-irlandaise. Les jeunes filles gracieuses, fascinantes et moqueuses, qui le font tant souffrir, la foule bruyante, railleuse, impulsive qui s'attache respectueusement aux pas du saint, et le faiseur de miracles lui-même sont des personnages secondaires seulement esquissés, mais, comme le joli décor de montagnes rases et désertes que représentait le théâtre, ils appartiennent bien à

l'Irlande et ils l'évoquent, cette Irlande humide et pourtant lumineuse, dont M. Synge a su si bien faire passer à travers toute sa pièce le charme secret et pénétrant, si particulier.

Faut-il voir simplement dans le "Well of the Saints" une étude réaliste de mœurs irlandaises, ou bien l'auteur a-t-il mis dans cette histoire de deux aveugles préférant l'erreur bienfaisante où ils ont longtemps vécu à la joie de voir la lumière qui révèle, en même temps que la beauté, les bassesses et les laideurs du monde, une pensée symbolique que les enjolivements habiles du style et un sens discret du mystère, mystère voulu peut-être par l'auteur, rendent difficile de préciser? L'idée symbolique de la pièce, s'il en est une, c'est sans doute le grand pouvoir et l'incomparable valeur de l'illusion, mille fois préférable à la jouissance complète de la réalité. Mieux vaut aller aveugle par les chemins bordés de petits murs pierreux, sentant sur son front le souffle humide du vent du sud, qui en Irlande conserve au teint des jeunes filles sa merveilleuse pureté, que de regarder sans dégoût, comme Timmy le forgeron, les misères humaines : la vilenie des hommes, la perfidie des femmes. L'idéalisme celtique, la puissance du rêve, la faculté de vie et de vision intérieure, le pouvoir et le désir de s'abstraire des laides réalités d'ici-bas, tout cela, et bien d'autres choses peut-être, est symbolisé par le choix final des époux aveugles.

Je n'ai point qualité pour parler de la langue toute spéciale dans laquelle est écrite la pièce, mais de l'avis des connaisseurs M. Synge a fait une sorte de tour de force en tirant une œuvre littéraire de cet espèce de jargon bizarre, plein d'idiotismes, de mots spéciaux, de formes grammaticales surannées, que parlent les paysans de l'ouest de l'Irlande, et qui souvent n'est qu'une transposition en anglais des formes et des règles grammaticales particulières à la langue nationale, l'irlandais moderne. Pareille transformation en langage artistique d'un parler local n'est sans doute possible qu'en Irlande, et pour se figurer l'adresse de métier qu'elle suppose, ce n'est pas aux écrivains qui écrivent en patois qu'il faut songer, mais plutôt à un littérateur qui tenterait par exemple d'écrire une œuvre dramatique dans l'espèce de français, plein d'incorrections et de provincialismes, que parlent les paysans bretons.

Et la place me manque pour parler de l'interprétation de la pièce, dont je dirai qu'il était probablement impossible de faire mieux. Comme l'auteur, les acteurs

étaient irlandais et tous, sauf l'acteur principal qui jouait le rôle de Martin Doul, étaient des amateurs. En interprétant le rôle du mendiant, M. Fay a fait pour ainsi dire une nouvelle création du personnage, parallèle à celle de l'auteur, tant il en a su rendre au naturel les sautes de caractère, les colères subites, les débordements d'injures : il y avait dans son art de la divination. Et il a su aussi s'approprier et faire saisir le rythme tout spécial dans le mouvement de la pensée et dans la phrase que communique au dialogue le langage populaire et paysan dans lequel il est écrit.

Il m'a sans doute échappé dans le "Well of the Saints," par suite de ma connaissance imparfaite de la langue, bien des choses qui en augmentent encore la valeur. Surtout je crains d'avoir, en insistant trop, obligé que j'étais d'analyser la pièce pour les lecteurs de cet article, alourdi, pour ainsi dire, en l'exprimant, l'impression de grâce adroite et subtile que j'ai moi-même retirée de ces trois petits actes, faits de presque rien, tout en nuances légères. . . . Au lendemain de la représentation, les journaux de Dublin ont accompagné leurs compte-rendus de critiques si sottes que ce me sera peut-être une excuse d'avoir osé en dire tout le bien que j'en pense. La presse ultra-catholique surtout n'a pas été tendre à M. Synge. N'a-t-il pas représenté dans sa pièce un vieux diable de mendiant qui tente de séduire une jeune fille, un miracle qui rate, et, qui plus est, ce même vieux diable renversant méchamment, au moment psychologique, l'eau sainte des mains du saint homme qui se prépare à le recommencer ? En Irlande c'en est assez pour motiver l'incompréhension et les attaques haineuses de ceux qui croient que les membres raccommodés à Lourdes tiennent toujours bien.

A LOVER OF THE WEST.

## EPIGRAMS.

"Brevity and succinctness of speech is that which in philosophy or speculation we call *maxim*, and first principle; in the counsels and resolves of practical wisdom, and the deep mysteries of religion, *oracle*; and lastly, in matters of wit and finenesses of imagination, *epigram*. All of them severally, and in their kinds, the greatest and the noblest things that the mind of man can show the force and dexterity of its faculties in."

—SOUTH : *Sermons*.

## I.

Many a teacher whom they praise  
Is no wiser than I am :  
Many a tedious volume weighs  
Lighter than an Epigram.

## II.

This life doth scarce its promise reach :  
In spite of praise and profit, each  
Enjoys but little he deserves,  
What with his conscience and his nerves.

## III.

Would you be quit of fears at last ?  
Each gay illusion from thee cast !  
Then, as I judge, on life's waste heath,  
You will not shun the robber, Death.

## IV.

Though accidents my plans confuse,  
Though these dark ways I did not choose,  
How dost thou leave me, power divine,  
Still, still to feel, "the fault was mine !"

## V.

In despair of outward things  
Mournful Psyche moults her wings.  
Dark and silent then are spun  
Wings that soar beyond the sun.

## VI.

Rise up no day that holds no hour  
When I may feel my spirit's power ;  
And, swiftly though the flash be spent,  
Yet for a moment be content !

## VII.

To war with evil in my breast  
Long have I settled is the best ;  
" But *hate* it also," urge good men :  
Alas, my strife were over then !

## VIII.

To whom our fealty is owing ?  
To whoso lives his soul's faith showing !  
The rest of men, whome'er they marry,  
Count them all up—Tom, Dick, and Harry !

## IX.

'Mongst women why no bard appears ?  
Them nature laughter gave and tears :  
She granted man, to soothe his prime,  
Music and wisdom, art and rime !

## X.

Live, if you would elude life's pain,  
Not with the heart, but with the brain !  
And yet in trouble take this grace :  
The heart is Wisdom's dwelling-place !

## XI.

Though Wisdom slumber not, deep slumbers  
Whoever of her sons she numbers :  
To bed she scolds them at eleven,  
And bids them all be up at seven !

## XII.

With all its boughs, my oracle,  
The woodland whispers, All is well !  
Fain would I tell you what's in store :  
The woodland will not tell me more.

J. E.

## THE NATION AND THE MAN OF LETTERS.

THERE is one question which will scarcely be settled among us until Ireland has taken her place among the comfortable and great nations. This is the question, How far, and in what sense, ought literature to be a distinctively national affair? In England, in France, in Russia, no one dreams of asking whether this or that great poem, or play, or novel may be classed as really national literature. Each of these countries has developed its own habits of thought, its own method of regarding things, its own way of writing, undisturbed by any excessive foreign influences. Mr. Thomas Hardy, for instance, though far from being a prophet of ordinary English ideas, has from his youth up lived in breast-to-breast intimacy with English men and manners and landscapes; and every novel he has written has been merely an imaginative rearrangement of the symbols of beauty and pride and sorrow that he has seen continually around him. Tolstoi, too, has provided in his novels a new and exalting synthesis of life as it could be beheld by none but Russian eyes; and the mysteries of the world always expressed themselves to Zola in the shapes of French systems and crowds and men. Whatever English or French or Russian literature may have originally owed to an inspiration coming from abroad, they have all long since ceased to be merely imitative. None of them, I suppose, aims consciously at being national. Each of them, however, is inevitably national, because the great writers in all three countries have not written of what they have merely read about in a fine book, or of what they know a fat public likes to hear, but have looked with sincere and intense eyes at the characteristic pageant of life as it goes by in the several countries to which they belong.

Here in Ireland our case is not so happy. Our writers have not grown up in a preponderatingly Irish atmosphere, as Hardy grew up in a preponderatingly English atmosphere. The study of literature in Ireland has for many years meant the study of English (or a foreign) literature. The study of literature in England denotes the study of English (or a national) literature. English history, English manners, English fashions, English ideas, English humour, English turns of speech, have absorbed the attention of cultured Irishmen in a degree that has often made

them indifferent to or contemptuous of life as it reveals itself in the traditions and lives and accidents of their own people. For a score of reasons, too, there has been no large book-buying public in Ireland. Consequently the Irish man of letters has generally gone to England to look for his fortune. Even when, like Lever, he has written about Irish men or things, he has written of them in the spirit of good-natured contempt which is a habit with the English or Anglo-Irish readers for whom he has—to use an ugly word in a just sense—"catered." He has filled the part of a showman, who takes tourists round just such sights as tourists love to see, and is anxious not to express any ideas of his own, but to guess at the ideas of his paymasters, and at once fall into step with them. Other writers, such as Goldsmith and Oscar Wilde, and many distinguished ladies now living, have frankly left out of their work any distinctive Irish element. Unlike Lever, they have, when all is said and done, painted specifically English men and manners. They share with Lever, however, the damning fault—damning from a national point of view—that they wrote in the consciousness that an English, not an Irish, audience was listening to them. It is better, perhaps, to forget one's family altogether than to remember it only for the purpose of making it a subject of easy mirth before strangers. And so Wilde and Goldsmith are more to be commended than Lever. It is a terrible thought, however, that for many generations almost all Irishmen of high literary gifts should have been like men fatally separated from their fathers and mothers, and should have grown fat either by mocking the old people in their poverty or by forgetting them altogether. It may be taken as proved that no body of writers ever produced great literature except when they were primarily addressing their own people. The Grecian drama was written by Greeks for Greeks, and the Elizabethan drama is the work of Englishmen who wrote with an English audience in prospect. The poets and playwrights of a nation may come under almost any foreign influence whatsoever, and still remain national so long as they address their statement of life to the men and women of their own country. Virgil's metres and themes, and his very phrases, were borrowed in an amazing degree from the Greeks, and yet who will deny that the *Æneid* or the *Georgics* is national Latin literature? Corneille derived his subjects and his stateliness of manner consciously from the classics, and yet, just because his plays were written to be produced before French spectators,



they remain one of the national inheritances of the French intellect. I am sure Irish men of genius might have produced a great literature if they had taken their own countrymen with sufficient seriousness to submit their poems and their stories to Irish censure or praise. Perhaps the chief work of thoughtful men in Ireland for some years to come will consist in preparing a fit audience for the coming of a man of genius, and in convincing Irish men of genius or talent that an Irish audience is the only audience to which he can speak sincere and immortal words.

Here, I imagine, is one very pressing reason why Irishmen should do all in their power to reacquire the use of their national language. If the Irish language were generally written and spoken in this country it would of necessity lead to the birth of a literature addressed especially to the Irish ear and spirit. Just at present, however, one is compelled to admit that the majority of Irish people both think and write in English terms. That the Irish-speaking Ireland of the future will produce a more complete and exultant literature than the English-speaking Ireland of the present, I am convinced. But I fear that, in a very splendid enthusiasm for things Irish, many of our critics are inclined to depreciate unjustly much of the poetry and drama that is being published in English by Irish writers. There is a small group of men of genius at present engaged in building up in English what I believe to be a truly national Irish literature. It includes Mr. W. B. Yeats and A. E., and Mr. J. M. Synge. Each of these writers has, I think, justified his claim to have produced national literature by the fact that, when he has given any thought to a public at all, it has been an Irish public. This may, perhaps, be questioned in the case of Mr. Yeats, but, in my opinion, unfairly. By the very exertions he has put forth in founding the Irish National Theatre he has proved how zealously he longs to have Irish companions to listen to him. Recently, however, it has not been Mr. Yeats, but Mr. Synge, who has been subjected to the greatest amount of sceptical criticism. Mr. Synge has had three very remarkable plays produced by the Irish National Theatre Society. Each of them proves him to be endowed with an intense dramatic vision, and to be one of those wonderful artists whose imaginations are a kind of alchemists, transforming the impure and artless world of common day into a new and strange world illuminated by the only immortal light—the light of great art. Mr. Synge has fulfilled what I believe to be the first requisite of a

national artist in that he has brought his precious things, like gifts, to the Irish people. One may doubt, however, if this is the only requisite. Is an artist justified in making characters that are by general admission not typically Irish the chief persons in an Irish play? The principal charge against Mr. Synge is that in *In the Shadow of the Glen* he has made an Irishwoman behave as Irishwomen do not generally behave. If those who are his most earnest detractors condemn him merely on the ground that he has not supplied us with a typical picture of Irish life, but has interested himself instead in abnormal persons, they must then condemn by implication all the great dramatic literature of the world. The Greeks, pursuing a comparable train of thought, might have condemned the *Hippolytus* of Euripides because Phaedra was not a typical Greek woman, and one might equally deny that *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or *Jude the Obscure* belonged to real English literature on the ground that Tess and the woman who entices Jude into sin are libels upon English womanhood. I imagine that every great character in fiction and drama is more or less a libel—sometimes a complimentary one—on the fellow-countrymen of the artist in whose imagination it was drawn. "Lear," as Thomas Davis once said, "is true to his nature, and so are Mephistopheles and Prometheus and Achilles; but they are not true to human nature; they are beings created by the poets' minds and true to *their* laws of being. There is no commoner blunder in men, who are themselves mere critics, never creators, than to require consistency to the nature of us and our world in the works of poet or painter." It may be urged that an observation like this refers only to the art which idealises, the art which depicts men and women as better or braver than they really are. In *In the Shadow of the Glen* Mr. Synge cannot of course be conceived as attempting to give an idealised representation of the Irish life that any of us have been accustomed to see. His method, indeed—even when, as in *The Well of the Saints*, he asserts the performance of a miracle in which he does not believe—has an air of being intensely realistic. Still, the idealists and the realists have this point of agreement, that they both select as persons worthy of artistic portrayal such characters as are distinguished from their fellows by having revolted against the general dead level of things—by having blasphemed against what is permissible and what is ordinary. The ordinary man in an ordinary frame of mind may be a fit object enough for scientific investi-

gation ; he can never be a worthy subject for treatment in a work of art. The critics of Mr. Synge do not, I think, sufficiently realize this. They do not seem to perceive that it is only when men are in a state of physical or moral or spiritual revolution that their lives become aflame with that dramatic intensity which, however it may shock the moralists, is to the artist the most precious and beautiful thing in the world. It is only when we dare to express our individuality, indeed, whether by excessive sin, or excessive suffering, or excessive nobility, or by a strange combination of all three, that we become desirable material upon which the dramatic artist may work. For at the moment at which we shed the desire to live as we have been taught or bribed to live, and dare to submit ourselves to some great and overmastering passion, we are at once symbols of some eternal force, whether of good or evil, and it is with symbols of eternal forces that even the most national art must concern itself if it is ever to attain real greatness.

So far as I can see, however, the objections to Mr. Synge's plays are principally the result of the chastity of the Irish mind. The better sort of Irishmen, indeed, are so eager to believe that all Irish men and women are chaste that they would almost be willing to deny the presence of sexual desire in any of us, failing to perceive that in such a passionless setting chastity is only a habit and not a virtue at all. Undoubtedly, chastity is one of the most shining virtues which Ireland has never compromised or never cast off amid the dismal events of the past many centuries. Still, the desire of the man for the woman, and of the woman for the man, lurks in the bodies of Irish people as it lurks in the bodies of human beings all the world over. Perhaps it was the curiosity rather than the passion of desire that Mr. Synge dealt with in *In the Shadow of the Glen*. He imagined a situation, if I remember the play correctly, in which a woman exchanged an old husband for a young lover, and ultimately, finding them both wanting, went out on the windy roads with a tramp. This kind of thing does not, of course, happen every day in Ireland. It may not have happened even once during the past century. Still, if the play does not express what an Irishwoman does, it expresses at least what a certain type of woman in this, as in all other countries, might be conceived of as doing if she only dared. The "preliminary lie" of the play is no more improbable than is the beginning of *King Lear*. On the

foundation of that lie Mr. Synge has built an ironical comedy and a wonderful dream that one feels rather than understands. The things which have interested him are the forces of passion, and revolt, and unrest, and he has imagined these forces working to a natural end in the person of an Irishwoman. He shows what would take place in certain dramatic circumstances, not what does take place in ordinary undramatic circumstances. In other words, like every true artist, he has depended upon his imagination rather than his observation. Every fine artist expresses in his art his own spiritual attitude towards life. And if his spirit goes out into the world and comes back with a different vision from any that we ourselves have ever experienced, we must not cavil so long as he imparts his vision sincerely and with the glamour of art. For art is even more an affair of individuality than of nationality. If we begin by cramping our artists, by limiting them to the expression of certain defined views of things and types of persons in certain defined ways, we shall only succeed—if we do succeed—in mutilating their individuality to such a degree that we shall never possess any great art, national or otherwise, at all.

R. W. LYND.

### "THE SEETHING POT."\*

GERALD GEOGHEGAN is the son of an Irish gentleman transported for heading an abortive insurrection in the Fenian years. Born and bred in Australia, but taught to know and love his father's country, he succeeds unexpectedly to a baronetcy and a great property in the County Mayo, and comes home to take up his new position full of eager interest in the land for which his father risked his life. The period at which the events are supposed to take place is the close of the Parnellite movement, and the story begins shortly before the outbreak of the struggle between the Irish leader (who figures under the name of John O'Neill), and the Church.

Such is the author's *mise en scène* in this very remarkable novel. It contains a piece of the history of Ireland, told with such power and insight that one might safely give this one book to a stranger who desired to know what were the forces stirring in the country, and shaping her future history, at the eventful and fateful epoch of Parnell's death. Ireland is the protagonist in the story. Sir Gerald Geoghegan's personality is only developed enough to enable him to become the object by working on which the various classes and movements in Ireland exhibit themselves, and come into artistic relation with each other. Mr. George A. Birmingham, whoever he may be, has in a striking degree the shaping and constructive power so often lacking in Irish works of imaginative art. He can hold himself in; he knows that the half is often greater than the whole. His treatment of the hero's love affair is an admirable study in delicate management of character and episode. Lady Hester is a charming sketch. She has one important thing to do at a critical moment, and she does it; but she is kept carefully in just the due half-light which prevents her from starting a double centre of interest in the book and confusing its unity.

This fine constructive art is one, but only one, of the qualities which make *The Seething Pot* stand out conspicuously in modern Irish literature. Except Mr. Moore's *Untilled Field*, I do not know any other work of prose fiction about Ireland which has the same dynamic force—which is, to sum it up in one phrase, so much a book

\* *The Seething Pot*. By George A. Birmingham. Edw. Arnold. 6s.

"to be reckoned with." It is a blot upon it, by the way, that one character portrayed in this book in an exceedingly unfavourable light has a couple of stories and phrases attached to him which will make people say, "That is George Moore." For it is *not* George Moore; and even if it were, this part of Mr. Birmingham's book belongs properly to polemics, not to literature. I am sorry for this, for if I admire a thing I have a weakness—a Celtic weakness perhaps—for liking to admire it all through. But let us get on to the things which are more excellent. The writer has humour, observation, and the power of drawing character; but the most striking feature in the book is the way in which historic forces are embodied in human types, and in which the development of the story, while determined at every step by inexorable circumstance, yet keeps the reader's interest fresh and keen to the end. One imagines that the author could write a good play, and now that we have a theatre at which a good play can be produced it may be hoped that he will try. Plays, even more than novels, gain in depth of attraction by the sense of impersonal forces behind the human characters who make the story.

The interest of the book begins to be serious when John O'Neill casts a speculative eye on the young Baronet who has come to live near O'Neill's own dwelling-place. Says O'Neill to his wife:—

"If there was the faintest chance that the gentry of the country would ever do anything else than lick the boots of Englishmen, I'd chuck up this wretched land agitation to-morrow. But they won't. I know them. They care nothing about Ireland. They'd see her turned into an English shire to-morrow without an effort to help her, if they could only make sure of getting their beggarly rents. But this young man is different, I say—at least, he ought to be different."

Gerald Geoghegan's position among the forces, ancestral and present, that are tugging at him is very subtly drawn. Strongly attracted by O'Neill's personality, keenly sympathetic with the people, he has the aristocrat's shrinking from the banalities and histrionisms of popular politics, and he has the scruples of an honourable gentleman about some of the weapons with which O'Neill fights his way. A man of such a character, at such a time, had no place in the public life of Ireland; yet it was almost inevitable that he should be drawn into it. Hence the tragedy of the situation.

The *dénouement* is brought about by a crisis resembling

that produced by the English Education Act a couple of years ago, when Mr. Redmond's Party found themselves obliged to choose between the claims of Irish Nationality and the pecuniary interests of the Catholic schools in England. The author imagines a question to arise upon the admission of foreign monastic orders into England, which gives the Liberals, with the aid of the Irish, a chance of turning out a coercion Government. O'Neill refuses to show his hand till the last moment; then he decides to fight the Government, and the Church issues, through a leading clerical paper, its summons to the party to desert him:—

"In the evening of the day on which it appeared, the O'Neills dined at Clogher House. The effect of the article formed almost the only subject of conversation. O'Neill, in spite of his efforts to carry the matter bravely, was evidently despondent at the turn things were taking.

"I always told you," he said, "that the priests would fight me, and beat me in the end. I didn't think the crisis would have come so soon."

"Are you sure," asked Sir Gerald, "that they will beat you now?"

"I am not certain," said O'Neill, "I can't be until after the meeting of the party next week. I told you the meeting was to be next week, didn't I? We shall see then. But I am very doubtful if my men will follow me."

"I am very doubtful," said Mrs. O'Neill, "whether it is wise to make the fight now. You seem to be giving them a great advantage over you. They are in the right at present. The whole English agitation is an absurdity, and, of course, the Government ought to be supported. I mean to say, if I was English, I should certainly support it. Wouldn't it be better to wait until you have got the priests in the wrong, and then fight them?"

"It's not a question of right or wrong at all," said O'Neill, "it's a question of politics. . . . I have a chance now of snatching the great prize, a chance I may never get again. If I can beat the Government, and the Opposition win at the General Election, they will have to give me what I want. I am not fighting the Government, or the priests, or anyone else, for a small thing. I'm fighting for the freedom of Ireland; and I have it in the hollow of my hand if I win just this one battle."

"But," said Sir Gerald, "what would be the good of an independent Ireland if the priests are to rule it? You said yourself that they would beat you in the end. I think that I would rather be governed by England than Rome."

"That," said O'Neill, "is the miserable mistake which has made Unionists of nine-tenths of the Protestants of Ireland.

They are afraid national independence would mean priestly rule. There never was a stupider blunder. The priests might rule an independent Ireland for five years. They would never guide so much as a county council after that. What gives the priests their power to-day is the unnatural alliance they made fifty years ago with the forces that are working for freedom and nationality. The confederacy is already breaking up, and can't survive the first independent Irish Parliament. The Church must fall back into its proper place as a great anti-national and tyrannical power."

"When things disentangle themselves," said Hester, "perhaps it will be easier to do simply what is right in politics. It seems to me as if it ought, somehow, to be possible."

"My dear lady," said John O'Neill, "if I win this battle, then ten years hence, when your husband is governing Ireland, you may talk to him about right and wrong, and if he listens to you this will be a happy country. If I'm beaten, then perhaps when you are an old, old woman, you can preach it to your grandson, for if we miss this chance, neither we nor our children will see Ireland free. In any case, there's no use talking about right or wrong to me. My position is that of the primitive savage. A refined morality would be my destruction."

How the great fight was fought, how it ended, and in what spirit Gerald Geoghegan turned to face the vista of his future life, are told by Mr. Birmingham with sure insight and a high degree of tragic power. The last chapter in the book is a letter to "my dear G. G.," which appears in an eccentric but delightful journal, *The Critic*, edited by one Desmond O'Hara, whose remarks, throughout the whole book, play like the gleams of a fitful but illuminating will-o'-the-wisp upon the seething contents of the Irish cauldron :—

"Far better," writes O'Hara, "it is to be sitting beside a seething pot than a stagnant pool. Dear G. G., let us keep the pot seething if we can. Let us do our little part in this dear Ireland of ours to stir men into the activities of thought and ambition. If we get our toes burnt and our fingers grimy, let us put up with it bravely. If there is a nasty smell, we shall remember that there is good food in the cauldron. . . . ."

"You will not be angry with me for my parable of the seething pot. It is not mine, you know, but the prophet's. I have only fitted it to Ireland—our dear Ireland, which we love best of all things, in spite—— Would we love Ireland as well as we do if we had not got to love her in spite of her breaking our hearts?"

T. W. ROLLESTON.



## A LITERARY CAUSERIE.

THE second number of *Uladh* has now been ready for some time ; it reached me a few days too late for notice in last month's *DANA*. It shows very great improvement on the first number, it is much less aggressive in tone and tiptoe in posture ; a good deal of its contents are devoted to an attempt to explain away many of the declarations of its predecessor and describe more accurately the aims of the paper. There are several interesting articles, among them one by Mr. Stephen Gwynn, entitled "The Northern Gael," which repeats and emphasizes what I wrote in this magazine about the first number of *Uladh*. Mr. Forrest Reid contributes a paper dealing with the recent Exhibition of Pictures at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Abbey Street, which it was proposed should be purchased to form the nucleus of a gallery of Modern Art in Dublin. Some other articles appeal almost entirely to the dwellers in Ulster, but Mr. F. J. Bigger's description of "An Ulster Village Library" is pleasant reading for anyone. He points out that between 1780 and 1800 small rural libraries were common in Antrim. "One hundred years ago men read books ; the farmer and the artisan of Antrim read books, or listened to men who had read books. To-day the penny weekly, lurid and varied, satisfies their wants." He describes the "Four Towns Book Club in the parish of Templepatrick," with its little circle of readers who were by no means rich in this world's goods, yet who managed to bring together and know intimately most of the principal works of the day in travel, romance, history, poetry and science, "and so in time a little coterie of writers, and thinkers, and peasant poets grew up. . . . At one time this library contained over 400 volumes—no mean collection one hundred years ago." He mentions that among the members the rudiments of education as now imparted, such as writing and spelling, were in many cases deficient, but the desire for learning and the general knowledge of literature were most pronounced. Another article tells us about the Ulster Literary Theatre, and the two plays that had been produced by that company, the "Reformers" and "Brian of Banba." I have not seen or read either of these plays, so cannot say whether I share the writer's very favourable opinion of them. The acting

he declares was on the whole very good, showing promise of much excellence when the players shall have had more experience. "The ease and dignity with which the "players performed their parts came as a pleasant surprise, and showed that in addition to the enthusiasm and "good-will which one knew they would bring to the task, "there was an unexpected reserve of dramatic power. "There was little or no self-consciousness, and all worked "together for the success of the pieces in a way that is "very rare in amateur companies. . . . In the "important art of staging and dressing the Ulster Literary "Theatre need fear no comparison with its more famous "rivals." Among the other contents are poems by A. E. and Padraic Colum. *Uladh* is again to be heartily congratulated on its drawings, notably the supplement by George Morrow, "The Isle of Laughing," which in itself is enough to persuade one to pay the sixpence which is the price of the magazine.

From Belfast comes, too, a little book of verses, *The Garden of the Bees*, by Seosamh MacCathmhaoil, published by Erskine Mayne in Belfast, and Gill and Son of Dublin. The printing is by Davidson and M'Cormack, of Belfast, who are responsible for *Uladh* also, and their work is quite good indeed. *The Garden of the Bees* contains about fifty pieces of verse, none of any considerable length. Mr. MacCathmhaoil is of the new school of Irish writers; he is inspired by their work and their example. His verse is in the manner of Ethna Carbery, but not so good. His rhythms are uncertain and faulty, his rhymes are too often untrue. I do not know if this is intentional, but the effect is unpleasing. There is a good deal of the new Irish convention, "little black roses" and the like; they fail to be very convincing. Now and then there is a really musical verse, but not often, though absolutely bad verses are equally rare. I like best of all the verses, "There lies a drift of purple cloud," because they preserve a uniformity of measure, and have a certain beat that singles them out from the rest of the collection:—

There lies a drift of purple cloud  
Upon the waters of the South;  
The waters of the South are dead,  
The cloud of purple is a pall.  
But in the blue above the drift  
The moon hath bent her silver bow,  
And thousand starry elves in white  
Are gliding down the galaxy.

The shadowed water is my soul ;  
 The cloud of purple is the pain  
 That lies about it all the night,  
 That no one reads, that no one knows,  
 The silver crescent is the love  
 That, like a lamp beyond the dark,  
 Dispels the thought of dread and death,  
 And cheers me in my loneliness.

Unfortunately the ear is disappointed of rhyme in these verses, and is not to be comforted. Mr. MacCathmhaoil shows considerable intimacy with the published work of Mr. W. B. Yeats, as can be seen from some of his phrases, such as "moth-time," "sleep comes dropping slow," "thy deep heart's core." On the whole *The Garden of the Bees* contains nothing new or of any distinction.

A little book worth getting is the very nicely printed *Well of the Saints*, the first of the Abbey Theatre series of plays: the second will be Lady Gregory's *Kincora*, which has now been played in Dublin. The last number of *Samhain* contains a very good portrait of Mr. Synge, as well as his play *In the Shadow of the Glen*, and a very long article by Mr. Yeats on the work and methods of the Irish National Theatre Society. The Dun Emer Press have just issued *Twenty Poems* by Lionel Johnson, a very slender volume of thirty pages, which is their best piece of printing so far, but remarkably dear at half-a-guinea. Messrs. Sealy, Bryers, and Walker have published a work on the ancient monasteries of Ireland called *A Second Thebaid*, by the Rev. J. P. Rushe, O.D.C., who has already written a similar work, *Carmel in Ireland*. The number of monasteries spoken of is almost incredible; all over the country they were to be found in every suitable situation, supported by pious gifts, and inhabited by devout men and women who withdrew from the mediaeval life of violence and sensuality to live in meditation and care for their own souls. For it was no part of a monk's duty to reform the world, all he had to do was to look after himself, to save himself from the wrath to come. A monastery was not intended to be a benevolent institution: and if a great religious house became, as it almost inevitably did become, the centre of civilization and refinement, it was in obedience to circumstances and forces acting wholly independently of the original object of the founder. It is really not at all easy to ascertain the exact part played by a monastery in the life of the time, Father Rushe giving very little attention to this side of his subject, and not saying much about the

actual way of living inside the cloisters : he is more at home in simply enumerating the foundations of the various orders. The writer takes the greatest pride in the ancient glories of the monastic orders in Ireland, the thousands of saints, abbots, and holy men and women of every degree who gave up all their responsibilities and duties in the world : "the calm of their beloved retreats seems to pervade the brief narratives of our saints, causing us almost to forget at times that in their days, even as in our own, there were absorbing interests at issue in the world without the cloister, compared with which, very often, the most revolutionary changes of modern history hardly appear important. Still mere temporal affairs were for them but the passing vanities of this life ; only what related to the soul claimed their earnest attention at all." How very different is the modern ecclesiastic in Ireland. In his volume *Troubled Times in Ireland*, also published by Messrs. Sealy, Bryers, and Walker, Mr. T. D. Sullivan tells us how, in 1900, he wished to present himself as candidate to represent West Donegal in Parliament. He went down from Dublin, and was well received in various towns, but the Most Rev. Dr. O'Donnell, Bishop of the Diocese, was unfavourable. Mr. Sullivan had gone through the town, complained the Bishop, getting a nomination paper signed without having obtained his assent ; "and said that if he held up his hand I would not get a vote in the parish. Next morning I bade adieu to Donegal, and took the train for Dublin." We can only wonder what would have been the consequences if Mr. Sullivan had persisted in his candidature. Would the Most Rev. Dr. O'Donnell have imitated Malory's good bishop :—

"Sir, said the noble clerk, leave this opinion at I shall curse you with book, bell, and candle."

He was defied.

"So the Bishop departed, and did the cursing in the most orgulist wise that might be done."

Thus debarred from his Parliamentary career, Mr. Sullivan prepared the present volume of reminiscences, covering the '48 Movement, the Phoenix Conspiracy, the Fenian Rising, the Home Rule agitations, the Parnellite Movement, the Land League, the Coercion Acts, etc., etc., as well as the internal struggles and quarrellings among the Nationalists. It ought to contain some interesting things, told as they are by one who shared in the events of a stirring epoch in Irish affairs.

F. M. ATKINSON.





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